UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

ACC

Administrative Committee on Coordination

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# REPORT OF THE NINTH MEETING OF THE INTER-AGENCY COMMITTEE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

(United Nations Headquarters, New York, 20 and 21 February 1997)

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## INTRODUCTION

1. The Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) held its ninth meeting in New York on 20 and 21 February 1997. The agenda for the session, as adopted by the Committee, is contained in annex I, the list of participants in annex II and the list of documents in annex III.

## I. MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON COORDINATION

### A. Follow-up to the outcome of meetings of ACC and other intergovernmental bodies

#### 1. ACC

2. The Committee, in its consideration of the follow-up to the outcome of the meetings of ACC, noted the request of ACC at its second regular session of 1996 to IACSD to pursue the review of its subsidiary structure with a view to its further streamlining. In view of the close links of that issue with agenda item 5 (Reports of subsidiary bodies reporting to IACSD), it was decided to consider that aspect of item 2 (a) when considering agenda item 5.

3. The Committee also considered the issue of the linkage between the work of the ACC task forces on the coordinated follow-up to conferences and IACSD. It was reported that two of the task forces were close to completing their work, the Task Force on Basic Social Services for All, and the Task Force on Employment and Sustainable Livelihoods; the third, the Task Force on the Enabling Environment for Economic and Social Development, was scheduled to hold its final meeting in June 1997.

4. In the absence of detailed information on the progress achieved in the work of the three task forces, however, the Committee was unable to have a detailed discussion on the issue. It nevertheless reiterated the need for closer substantive links between the ACC task forces and IACSD. The Committee underlined the need to emphasize the role of IACSD vis-à-vis the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions and the task forces in the ACC statement to the special session of the General Assembly to review the implementation of Agenda 21. It also agreed that the text of the ACC statement should be provided to the Task Force on the Enabling Environment, through its Chairman, to enable it to consider the views contained therein in the preparation of its final report. The Committee recognized that it would not be possible to follow a similar approach with respect to the two other task forces since they were scheduled to complete their work before the issuance of the ACC statement.

#### 2. Intergovernmental bodies

5. The representative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) briefed the Committee on the outcome of the nineteenth session of the UNEP

Governing Council, held at Nairobi from 26 January to 7 February 1997. He underlined the crucial importance for UNEP of that session of the Council, and indicated that discussions had focused on a number of future challenges for UNEP, including the reformulation of a clear definition of its future role and functioning. This was reflected in the Nairobi Declaration, a strong statement confirming the role and mandate of UNEP, which was adopted by the ministers and heads of delegations attending the high-level segment of the Council and would be before the General Assembly at the special session (A/S-19/5, annex).

6. He also informed IACSD that the Governing Council had reached agreement on several programme initiatives, including the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities; further development of international environmental law; environmental monitoring, assessment and early warning (global environment outlook); development of an international chemical agenda; and the development of a legally binding instrument on prior informed consent and legal action to reduce persistent organic pollutants.

7. The Governing Council had also agreed on the programme budget for the current and next bienniums, requesting at the same time that the Executive Director explore ways and means to secure adequate and more predictable funding in the future. The debate on the question of governance, including the proposed establishment of an inter-sessional body to provide programmatic guidance to the Executive Director, had not been completed, and the President of the Council had decided to suspend the meeting until the question was resolved. Immediately after the adjournment of the session, UNEP had undertaken consultations with members of the Council and the Committee of the Permanent Representatives based at Nairobi in order to resolve the issue. The representative of UNEP expressed optimism that there would be an early resolution to the issue.

8. Several members of IACSD expressed the hope that the situation would be resolved soon, and considered that the outcome of the nineteenth session of the Governing Council, particularly in terms of the substantive decisions taken and the political support for UNEP among delegations, boded well for the future of UNEP.

9. IACSD was also briefed by the representative of the World Health Organization (WHO) on the recently held second meeting of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS). He reported that in different areas related to chemical safety, the level of achievement was most encouraging. In the areas of chemical risk assessment, harmonization and classification of labelling of chemicals, and chemical risk reduction, work was progressing well and responding to most of the previously established targets. The Forum had prepared a report and had made specific recommendations regarding chapter 19 of Agenda 21, which were to be presented by Canada, the host of the second meeting of IFCS, to the Commission on Sustainable Development and the special session of the General Assembly. The new international mechanism for coordination between international and national intergovernmental organizations - the Inter-organizational Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals, established in 1995 - had become an important instrument for IFCS.

10. The Committee was also provided with a briefing by the representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on developments within her organization since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) on the question of refugees and the environment.

## B. Review of preparations for the special session of the General Assembly to review the implementation of Agenda 21

### 1. Matters related to documentation and the participation of agencies in the special session, including special events

11. IACSD was briefed on the organizational arrangements for the forthcoming meeting of the Ad Hoc Inter-sessional Working Group of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the special session of the General Assembly to review the implementation of Agenda 21, including the anticipated arrangements for the involvement of the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system in those meetings.

12. Regarding the meeting of the Ad Hoc Group and the fifth session of the Commission, it was agreed that representatives of United Nations system organizations or bodies would be available during those meetings in their resource capacity to provide advice and assistance to the preparatory process. It was felt that the possible interventions from United Nations organizations or bodies during the debates in the meeting of the Commission should focus on key policy issues relevant to specific matters under consideration, rather than merely provide information on the activities that individual organizations had carried out since UNCED.

13. Since the rules of procedure during the special session of the General Assembly provided only a limited opportunity for United Nations agencies' involvement in its formal deliberations, the Committee was informed that the President of the General Assembly intended to allow a limited number of statements from United Nations bodies on the basis of the following criteria: (a) that the organization or body was either a task manager for one of the chapters of Agenda 21 or one of the international financial institutions of the United Nations system; (b) that the statements would be delivered at the level of the executive head of the particular organization or body.

14. Other opportunities for the involvement of the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system in the special session would include participation, including making interventions, in the work of the Committee of the Whole, and the organization of side events. The Committee noted the preference of the President of the General Assembly that all side events take place either during the lunch breaks of the special session or at the end of the day's meeting in order to avoid conflicts with official meetings of the special session.

15. The Committee also agreed that United Nations organizations or bodies which planned to be represented at the level of executive heads or planned to organize side events during the special session should inform the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat as

soon as possible so that such proposals could be brought to the attention of the President of the General Assembly and scheduled, as appropriate. In the case of the organization of exhibitions on the United Nations premises, organizations or bodies were requested to inform the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat, which chaired the United Nations Exhibitions Committee, directly, since that Committee possessed the formal authority for approving such requests. Furthermore, IACSD noted that in accordance with existing policy, all additional costs related to the organization of side events would need to be covered by the respective organizations or bodies.

### 2. Consideration of the draft ACC statement to the 1997 special session of the General Assembly

16. IACSD wishes to bring the attention of ACC to the draft ACC statement to the 1997 special session of the General Assembly, which was finalized at the current meeting of the Committee and is contained in annex V. In accordance with the request of ACC, the draft was formally submitted to ACC members by correspondence to enable it to be issued in good time before the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, thereby facilitating its greater impact.

## C. Proposed agenda, dates and venue for the tenth meeting of the Committee

17. It was agreed that IACSD would hold its next meeting at Geneva at the headquarters of WHO for two to three days during the week of 15 September 1997. The provisional agenda is contained in annex IV.

## D. Report of the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources on its seventeenth session

18. In considering the report of the Subcommittee on Water Resources, IACSD reviewed its functioning. There was general agreement that the Subcommittee was functioning well in pursuing the objectives outlined in its terms of reference, and had proved to be an effective mechanism for inter-agency collaboration in monitoring the implementation of chapter 18 of Agenda 21.

19. The Committee also approved the holding of the eighteenth session of the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources at the headquarters of the International Atomic and Energy Agency at Vienna from 1 to 3 October 1997.

## E. Report of the ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas on its fifth session, World Bank headquarters, Washington, D.C., 7 to 10 January 1997

20. In considering the report of the Subcommittee, IACSD reviewed its functioning. There was also general agreement that the Subcommittee was functioning well in pursuing the objectives outlined in its terms of reference.

The members of IACSD considered that the Subcommittee had proved to be an effective mechanism for inter-agency collaboration in monitoring the implementation of chapter 17 of Agenda 21, particularly in the preparation of the review and appraisal reports to the General Assembly. The Committee agreed to amend the terms of reference of the Subcommittee to reflect its performance in its additional capacity as the Steering Committee on Technical Cooperation and Assistance for the Global Programme of Action, as invited by the Governing Council of UNEP at its nineteenth session. It was noted that the Subcommittee would undertake that function in collaboration with the Subcommittee on Water Resources. The Committee thus concluded that the current arrangements for the functioning of the Subcommittee should remain in place.

21. The Committee approved the proposed timing for the sixth session of the ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas during the week of 19 January 1998. IACSD noted the proposal of the Subcommittee for its meeting to be held preferably at Lisbon in view of the launching of the 1998 International Year of the Ocean and Expo '98, and cautioned that the logistical implications of the convening of the meeting of the Subcommittee away from the main or subregional headquarters of one of the United Nations agencies or organizations should be addressed by the Subcommittee in making a final recommendation to IACSD.

22. IACSD also endorsed the unanimous recommendation of the Subcommittee that Mr. I. Steiner (United Nations) be appointed Vice-Chairman.

## II. WORK OF IACSD

### A. Streamlining of national reporting

23. The Committee considered the background paper prepared by the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat, which contained a number of proposals for the streamlining of national reporting and had been prepared on the basis of inter-agency consultations. The paper was prepared in response to the request of the Commission on Sustainable Development, at its fourth session, that the Secretary-General, in cooperation with interested States, provide the Commission at its fifth session with proposals for streamlining national reporting in the field of sustainable development, in which the country profiles could be the initial step towards streamlining reporting requirements, and also in response to recommendations made by IACSD at its eighth meeting, in July 1996.

24. It was stressed that the objective was to agree on a common approach to streamlining and a division of labour among the various organizations of the system requesting reports. Furthermore, the focus was on the streamlining of reporting processes (that is, on requests for information made to Governments) and not on the products of those requests.

25. After reviewing the proposals contained in the background paper, IACSD agreed on the following:

(a) That all relevant organizations in the United Nations system and secretariats of relevant conventions should participate in the process of streamlining national reporting;

(b) That official information from Governments of relevance to Agenda 21 would be shared in such a manner that Governments would not be requested to provide the same information to more than one United Nations organization or convention secretariat;

(c) That information mandated by legally binding instruments, as well as by decisions and resolutions of intergovernmental bodies, would continue to be provided to the respective convention secretariats, and that other United Nations system organizations and bodies that requested national information would continue to do so. In both cases, the respective secretariats would make that information available, as appropriate for Agenda 21, to the secretariat of the Commission on Sustainable Development for inclusion in future updated country profiles. Without prejudice to future decisions of the Commission, countries would not be requested to provide this information separately to the Commission unless they had not reported it previously (e.g., where reports were requested by a convention, but a country was not a party to that convention). It was also agreed that, at all times, Governments would have the discretion to report additionally to the Commission or to any other body, particularly where they found the process of reporting beneficial to their own strategic planning and participatory decision-making;

(d) That organizations and bodies that had not yet done so would move towards making their information available electronically, on a country-by-country basis, in a manner that would facilitate electronic linkages among the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system and the secretariats of the conventions. In the meantime, information that was not yet available electronically would similarly be shared to further the streamlining exercise;

(e) That the country profiles being prepared by the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development on behalf of the Commission on Sustainable Development should serve as a basis for streamlined socio-economic information of relevance to sustainable development, in full cooperation with the Statistics Division of the United Nations Secretariat, by linking with the relevant databases of the United Nations system;

(f) That a reporting calendar would provide a useful informational and planning tool for national Governments, and should therefore be pursued;

(g) That the streamlining process be linked to the parallel exercise of common access to United Nations system databases and a sustainable development Web site, which were also being undertaken through IACSD at the request of the Commission;

(h) That consultations be undertaken within the system of resident representatives, both with regard to strengthening support to capacity-building provided at the country level for the preparations of national reports, and for dovetailing the streamlining process with the information that was provided for country strategy notes;

(i) That a longer-term approach and work plan be developed which would include, inter alia, consultations with organizations and bodies of the United Nations system on modalities for accessing their data; further consideration of core data sets related to sustainable development; preparation of a manual on sustainable development reporting; working towards the establishment of country-owned Web sites for sustainable development, on the understanding that there were many countries which required capacity-building assistance in order to be able to develop and maintain those Web sites; and the facilitation of support to capacity-building at the national level, both for the preparation of national reports and for providing those reports in an electronic format convenient to the country concerned.

26. The meeting also agreed that streamlining would begin in a limited manner, as outlined above, but could broaden over time to include data other than mandated national reports if that appeared to be both desirable and feasible. Issues of confidentiality of information would also be considered.

## B. Reports of subsidiary bodies reporting to IACSD

### 1. Report of the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources on its seventeenth session

27. The Secretary of the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources introduced the report of the Subcommittee on its seventeenth session (ACC/1996/19). He acknowledged the important contribution of the members of the Subcommittee in the preparation of the comprehensive assessment of global freshwater resources, and drew the attention of the Committee to the four major issues dealt with in the report, namely the urgent problem of the continued degradation of water quality around the world, the protection of the marine environment and coastal areas from land-based activities, the need to establish a database containing information on the activities of member agencies, and the Global Water Partnership (GWP). He informed IACSD that the Subcommittee supported a proposal for the development of a comprehensive water quality programme, representing a cooperative effort of five United Nations bodies (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNEP, the United Nations University, the Department for Development Support and Management Services of the United Nations Secretariat and WHO), based on a carefully selected global network of representative drainage basins which encompass the broad spectrum of environments, so that future extrapolation to unmonitored basins could be achieved.

28. With regard to the issue of the protection of the marine environment, there was a need for deriving greater synergies from closer cooperation between the subcommittees on water and on oceans and coastal areas. The members of the Subcommittee decided that the Chairman of the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources would contact his counterpart on the ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas prior to its next meeting, regarding cooperation in support of implementation of the Programme of Action.

29. On the question of the database, it was decided that it should begin with describing the United Nations field-level activities, with an initial focus on

sub-Saharan Africa, and later be developed to include information on global, regional and local activities. A task force, comprising the representatives of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Bank, the Department for Development Support and Management Services, UNESCO, UNEP and the Economic Commission for Africa, was formed to consider the issue and make recommendations on the scope and content of the database and on an implementation schedule. It was noted that the first draft of a proposed database structure had already been distributed by UNDP.

30. The Committee was informed that GWP had been officially launched at Stockholm in August 1996, and represented an international mechanism aiming to translate the consensus on water management into responsive, coherent services to developing countries, emphasizing local implementation.

31. Finally, the Secretary of the Subcommittee also noted the successful observation of the 1996 World Water Day, and described plans for the next one in 1997.

32. Members of IACSD supported the idea of establishing a database, including the monitoring of specific river basins, an integrated research and training programme to develop the appropriate water quality models to address the needs of water supply, water and health, and the broader objective of improving the condition of the environment. The Committee recognized that sustainable water resources management was a crucial emerging priority, and supported proposals for establishing programmes to monitor and improve water quality, with a possible link to river-based programmes, control of land-based pollution and protection of coastal waters. There was also broad support for linking the improvement of water supply and sanitation with health issues, given that the message on that crucial interrelationship was not always conveyed successfully. It was also agreed that the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) should participate in the joint programme to improve water quality.

33. Members of IACSD agreed on the need for improving links with organizations and bodies outside of the United Nations system, and supported ongoing regular dialogue and interaction in that area, without imposing any rigid structural arrangements. It was felt, however, that the greatest benefits of that approach could only be achieved if there was first some coordination among the many different water-related institutions and programmes. The Committee supported the proposal for the Subcommittee to hold an informal meeting with non-governmental organizations in conjunction with the next session of the Subcommittee.

34. Finally, members of IACSD stressed the importance of the human dimension of the water supply and sanitation problem, which should be also addressed, noting that a solution to the problem of expanded coverage would require the support of urban and rural development strategies to generate local income in order to finance the maintenance of new or improved infrastructure and services.

35. IACSD also approved the dates and venue of the eighteenth session of the Subcommittee, to be held at the headquarters of the International Atomic Energy Agency at Vienna from 1 to 3 October 1997, to be preceded by the meeting of the Inter-Agency Committee on Water Supply and Sanitation.

36. It was also agreed that the Chairman of the Subcommittee should represent the Subcommittee at the meetings of the Interim Committee of the Global Water Partnership. IACSD also welcomed the participation in the Interim Committee of the Chief of the Water Resources Development and Management Service of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

## 2. Report of the ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas on its fifth session

37. The report of the ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas on its fifth session (ACC/1997/3), which was held at World Bank headquarters, Washington, D.C., from 7 to 10 January 1997, was introduced by the Subcommittee's Chairperson from UNEP. She briefly summarized the major conclusions and recommendations agreed by the Subcommittee, including proposals for its future programme of work. The Committee was also informed of the decision of the UNEP Governing Council inviting the Subcommittee to perform, in collaboration with the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources, the functions of a steering committee on technical cooperation and assistance for the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine-Environment from Land-based Activities, including activities related to the clearing house, with representation from regional and international organizations which have primary roles and responsibilities for its implementation.

38. The Chairperson pointed out that, if endorsed by the IACSD and ACC, the new reporting responsibilities associated with the Programme of Action would be in addition to future reporting obligations of the Subcommittee with respect to its functions as task manager for chapter 17 of Agenda 21, as well as those related to undertaking periodic overall reviews of all aspects of the marine environment and its related issues, as proposed by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fourth session. The Subcommittee welcomed this decision, as well as General Assembly resolution 51/34, in which the Assembly had called for an annual review and evaluation by the Assembly of developments relating to ocean affairs and the law of the sea, beginning at its fifty-second session. The Chairperson also drew to the attention of IACSD the concern felt by the Subcommittee that the Secretary-General's proposal for the Commission to carry out an in-depth review of oceans and seas in 1999 might be more appropriately timed to coincide with the International Year of the Ocean in 1998. She furthermore reiterated the Subcommittee's previous recommendation to IACSD at its eighth session that it might be more efficient for the Subcommittee to report directly to ACC in future.

39. Additional priority areas for the Subcommittee's work include its preparations for celebrating the 1998 International Year of the Ocean with a number of joint activities and the World Exposition in 1998 devoted to oceans (Expo '98). The Subcommittee has initiated work to prepare a pilot phase of a United Nations atlas of the oceans for Expo '98, which will be available in digital form, on CD-ROM and on the Internet. The Chairperson also referred to the ongoing work of the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection to prepare an assessment of the health of the oceans by 2002. As a first step in that assessment, the next periodic update on

coastal areas in regional seas, including relevant river systems, would be available in 1998.

40. Taking into account the need for regular consultations on the various aspects of its new work plan, including a strengthened collaboration with the Subcommittee on Water Resources, the Subcommittee was considering holding informal consultations with the Subcommittee on Water Resources in conjunction with an informal meeting of the Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas to be held from 6 to 8 August 1997 at Stockholm. The Subcommittee had already established close cooperation with the Subcommittee on Water Resources, including inviting its Chairman to participate in annual meetings. The Subcommittee suggested convening its sixth session during the week of 19 January 1998, preferably at Lisbon in connection with the launching of Expo '98.

41. Finally, the Subcommittee had unanimously recommended that Mr. Ismat Steiner, Director of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the United Nations Secretariat, be named Vice-Chairman in place of Mr. Moritaka Hayashi, who had recently transferred from that post to assume new duties with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

42. The members of IACSD welcomed and endorsed the UNEP Governing Council s invitation to the Subcommittee on Oceans to act as the inter-agency steering committee for the Programme of Action. They expressed their strong support for using an existing coordination body that was seen to be effective rather than establishing a new mechanism, and they also appreciated the ongoing efforts by both the oceans and water subcommittees to further strengthen their collaboration. They welcomed, as an important initiative, the new work plan proposed by the Subcommittee, which went beyond information exchange and the preparation of reports for the Commission to focus on specific joint activities and substantive collaboration among agencies. It was also suggested that an item on system-wide preparations for the 1998 International Year of the Ocean should be added to the agenda of the next ACC and IACSD meetings, and that the Joint United Nations Information Committee should be invited to be involved. On the question of reporting arrangements, it was generally agreed that there was no need at the present time to recommend changing the Subcommittee's relationship as a subsidiary body of IACSD, although it was pointed out that the new assignment given to the Subcommittee in connection with the Programme of Action would require amending the Subcommittee's terms of reference.

## C. Other matters

### 1. Coordination of the geoscience programmes of the United Nations system

43. In introducing the item, the representative of WMO explained the reasons that had led the Secretary-General of WMO to convene a group of eminent persons in their personal capacities to a meeting on the subject of the geoscience programmes in the United Nations system. He stated that WMO had taken the initiative following discussion at its Congress in 1995 concerning the need to streamline the work of WMO and enhance its effectiveness in that field. He

recalled that all organizations and bodies of the United Nations system involved in activities related to the geosciences had been informed about that meeting in October 1996; the report of the meeting was distributed to the members of IACSD.

44. Members of IACSD discussed the report and presented their views on it. They stressed the importance they attached to enhanced coordination and cooperation in that area among the United Nations system organizations and bodies concerned. They acknowledged the prerogative of the individual executive heads to take initiatives in their areas of competence and to seek outside expertise to advise on issues related to their particular programmes. They felt, however, that given the involvement of various United Nations organizations and bodies in several aspects of the issue, the meeting of eminent persons could have benefited from the views of the organizations concerned. In addition, they felt that although the report of the meeting contained a number of proposals, many of its recommendations required further discussion. With regard to those recommendations, the view was expressed that full advantage should always be taken of existing institutions and coordination mechanisms.

45. In view of the importance and complexity of the issues involved, IACSD agreed that it would review the matter at its forthcoming meeting, based on further information to be provided by WMO, and would prepare for ACC's consideration of the matter.

## 2. Other issues

### Proposed global initiative for the protection and promotion of health and environment in border areas

46. The representative of WHO briefed the Committee on a proposed global initiative for the protection and promotion of health and environment in border areas, which are generally more prone to social, political, humanitarian, environmental and health problems, and are usually deficient in basic information and statistics. He considered that there was a need to recognize the complex problems affecting peoples living in these areas and bring their concerns to the attention of authorities worldwide, as recommended by the Global Advisory Committee on Health Research, which had recommended that WHO address those issues in collaboration with other organizations of the United Nations system. IACSD recognized that there was a need to alert authorities worldwide to the increasing threat to public health stemming from the neglect and underdevelopment of border areas and the communities that inhabit them, and a number of agencies indicated interest in such an initiative and in collaborating with WHO on the issue. IACSD therefore agreed to consider the issue for discussion at a future meeting, after the necessary consultations, under the leadership of WHO with other concerned organizations or bodies of the United Nations system, had been completed.

Annex I

AGENDA OF THE NINTH MEETING OF THE INTER-AGENCY COMMITTEE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1. Adoption of the agenda and timetable.

2. Follow-up to the outcome of meetings of:

   (a) ACC;

   (b) Intergovernmental bodies.

3. Review of preparations for the special session of the General Assembly to review the implementation of Agenda 21:

   (a) Matters related to documentation and the participation of agencies in the Special Session, including special events;

   (b) Consideration of the draft ACC statement to the 1997 special session of the General Assembly.

4. Streamlining of national reporting.

5. Reports of subsidiary bodies reporting to IACSD:

   (a) Report of the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources on its seventeenth session;

   (b) Report of the ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas on its fifth session.

6. Other matters:

   (a) Coordination of the geoscience programmes of the United Nations system;

   (b) Dates, venue and provisional agenda for the 10th meeting of IACSD;

   (c) Other issues: proposed global initiative for the protection and promotion of health and environment in border areas.

7. Adoption of the report.

Annex II

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Chairman: N. Desai (United Nations)

Secretary: C. Hackett (United Nations)

United Nations, its entities and programmes

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|---|---|
| Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development | J. Waller-Hunter<br>P. Najlis<br>A. Rogers<br>A. Vasilyev<br>H. Morita-Lou<br>M. P. Silveira-Williams<br>E. Matthews |
| Department for Development Support and Management Services | M. Brewster |
| Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis | P. Bartelmus<br>R. Shah |
| Office of Legal Affairs | J. Escudero<br>G. Göttsche |
| Department of Humanitarian Affairs | P. Boullé |
| United Nations Centre for Human Settlements | A. P. Celik |
| Economic Commission for Africa | A. Bahri |
| Regional Commissions New York Office | M. McCaffery |
| United Nations Conference on Trade and Development | G. Kell |
| United Nations Environment Programme | A. Amin<br>W. Ponikiewski |
| United Nations Children's Fund | G. Ghosh<br>Jingjing Qian |
| United Nations Development Programme | K. Jorgensen |
| United Nations Population Fund | H. Jemai |
| United Nations International Drug Control Programme | S. Bryant |

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| Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees | F. Naylor |

Specialized agencies and related organizations

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|---|---|
| International Labour Organization | D. Smith |
| Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations | F. H. Weibgen<br>S. Nakouzi |
| United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization | G. Glaser |
| World Health Organization | W. Kreisel |
| World Bank | J. Martin-Brown |
| International Monetary Fund | J. B. Zulu<br>H. Shugarman |
| World Meteorological Organization | S. Chacowry<br>C. Don Nanjira |
| World Intellectual Property Organization | K. Suedi |
| United Nations Industrial Development Organization | M. Rigola |

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| International Atomic Energy Agency | M. S. Opelz |

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| Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity | T. Gross |
| Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Severe Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa | S. Briceño |
| Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change | J. Pasztor |

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| ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources | P. Najlis |
| ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas | T. Melvasalo |

Annex III

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

| | |
|---|---|
| ACC/IACSD/IX/1997/CRP.1 | Annotated provisional agenda |
| ACC/IACSD/IX/1997/CRP.2 | Timetable |
| ACC/IACSD/IX/1997/CRP.3 | Review of preparations for the special session of the General Assembly to review the implementation of Agenda 21: consideration of the draft ACC statement to the 1997 special session of the General Assembly, discussion paper prepared by the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat |
| ACC/IACSD/IX/1997/CRP.4 and Add.1 | Streamlining of national reporting: paper prepared by the Department setting forth additional proposals for the streamlining of national reporting |
| ACC/IACSD/IX/1997/CRP.5 | Reports of subsidiary bodies reporting to IACSD: report of the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources on its seventeenth session, (UNESCO headquarters, Paris, 9-11 October 1996) |
| ACC/IACSD/IX/1997/CRP.6 | Reports of subsidiary bodies reporting to IACSD: report of the ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas on its fifth session (World Bank headquarters, Washington, D.C., 7-10 January 1997) |
| ACC/IACSD/IX/1997/CRP.7 | Other matters: coordination of the geoscience programmes of the United Nations, WMO brochure on the geosciences and the United Nations system |

Annex IV

PROVISIONAL AGENDA FOR THE TENTH MEETING OF THE
INTER-AGENCY COMMITTEE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1. Adoption of the agenda and timetable.

2. Follow-up to the special session of the United Nations General Assembly to review the implementation of Agenda 21.

3. Coordination of geoscience programmes of the United Nations system.

4. Proposed global initiative for the protection and promotion of health and environment in border areas.

5. Reports of subsidiary bodies reporting to IACSD.

6. Other matters.

7. Adoption of the report.

Annex V

DRAFT STATEMENT BY THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON COORDINATION TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT ITS SPECIAL SESSION

1. Sustainable development remains one of the most important challenges facing humanity as it approaches the twenty-first century. Yet there is growing concern that failure to accelerate economic growth and development in vast areas of the world, to resolve burning social problems, to correct unsustainable production and consumption patterns and increasing inequity, and to halt deterioration of the environment will irreversibly limit national capacities to respond to future challenges.

2. It is the collective view of the executive heads of the organizations of the United Nations system participating in the Administrative Committee on Coordination that the concept of sustainable development provides an over-arching policy framework for the entire spectrum of United Nations system-wide activities at the global, regional and country levels. Sustainable development, as set out in Agenda 21, the action plan of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held at Rio de Janeiro, calls for the implementation of inter-related policies promoting economic development, improved social equity and environmental sustainability. As such, it requires a more integrated approach to policy development, involving new ways of thinking, new institutional mechanisms and new partnerships with a wide variety of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

3. A renewed system-wide effort is called for to address the implications of globalization and liberalization in the world economy, bearing in mind the major new opportunities being opened up for trade and investment and information and technology flows, but also the risks of marginalization of the poorest countries, and the poorest groups, especially women and children, within countries.

4. International commitments to achieving sustainable development have been strengthened by the outcomes of the series of major world development conferences held during the 1990s.[1] These meetings have focused attention on the social dimension of sustainable development, in particular the overwhelming priority of poverty alleviation. Widespread poverty is a core factor in perpetuating economic stagnation, social deprivation, ill health and environmental degradation. Other conferences have increased attention to the socio-economic aspects of sustainable development.[2]

5. Successful efforts have been made to sensitize public opinion and to mobilize international cooperation, as well as to adopt specific programmes to implement Agenda 21 and to establish relevant institutional mechanisms at the international, regional, national and local levels. However, much remains to be done to restore the momentum generated at the Rio Conference and fulfil the commitments made there. Greater political leadership is needed to forge global partnership to advance Agenda 21.

6. The Administrative Committee on Coordination is resolved to meet the major challenges involved in effective implementation of commitments made at the Rio Conference. Follow-up will require a high degree of policy integration and the Committee is intent on continuing its development of effective tools and techniques to improve system-wide coordination within the United Nations system. Major change and adaptation have already been undertaken in this regard to support effective implementation at the international and national levels.

7. The Administrative Committee on Coordination attaches the greatest importance to the improvement of field-level implementation of the Rio commitments, through a coordinated approach at the country level. It particularly supports the strengthening of inter-agency cooperation at the regional level, which has great potential for practical programme delivery. Enhanced cooperation will include regional organizations outside the United Nations system.

8. The Administrative Committee on Coordination is committed to the further enhancement of cooperation among organizations of the United Nations system and a wide variety of non-governmental stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations, major groups and other components of civil society. Linkages among functional responsibilities for information resources, policy development and operational programmes will be explored in the period following the 1997 review.

9. The Administrative Committee on Coordination believes that the task manager system of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development has led to more effective use of resources and expertise within the United Nations system and is a promising improvement over previous efforts at inter-agency cooperation. However, the system has not yet reached its full potential in terms of defining policy linkages and the sharing of responsibilities to achieve full programme synergy. The Administrative Committee on Coordination will continue to strengthen inter-agency coordination with the aim of advancing more integrated and cost-efficient policy approaches. The Inter-Agency Committee will play an important role in this regard.

10. Coordination cannot be achieved at the secretariat level alone, however. The executive heads of the organizations of the United Nations system participating in the Administrative Committee on Coordination would welcome the development of clearer and more consistent intergovernmental and national level policies for sustainable development. Clear guidance at the international and national levels would greatly facilitate the efforts of United Nations agencies to carry out their mandates effectively, and reduce the possibility of dissipation of scarce financial resources.

11. An important constraint is the financial crisis affecting the United Nations and many of the specialized agencies, which leaves little room for expanded initiatives. The expectations of additional resources raised at Rio have not been fulfilled. As a result, many organizations are having difficulty in carrying out the important activities resulting from the Conference and responding to the additional work requirements of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

12. Experience gained since the Conference has led the Administrative Committee on Coordination to the firm belief that the time has come for a new approach to policy-making which stresses practical actions to achieve sustainable development. Intergovernmental policy discussions could usefully be reoriented to focus on a limited number of strategic priority issues, the emphasis being on linkages between resource management and the role of economic actors and major groups. Such an approach would stimulate greater attention to cross-cutting issues such as population, gender, health, impact on children, production and consumption patterns, and to means of implementation, in particular financing mechanisms and technology transfer, capacity-building and education.

Notes

[1] The World Summit for Children, the World Conference on Education for All, the World Conference on Human Rights, the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development, the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements.

[2] The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (ninth session), the World Trade Organization Ministerial Meeting in Singapore and the World Food Summit.

APPENDIX

Sustainable development in the United Nations system:
an explanatory note

FROM CONCEPT TO ACTION

1. The commitments made at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and other conferences have presented a major challenge to the entire system of United Nations programmes and institutions. Effective implementation of Agenda 21 and other Rio agreements, as well as the need for coherent multidisciplinary support to intergovernmental processes in the area of sustainable development, particularly to the Commission on Sustainable Development, have had a significant effect on virtually all organizations and programmes of the United Nations system, both jointly - in particular through the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development - and individually. The Administrative Committee on Coordination believes that the challenge has generally been met with enthusiasm and a solid commitment by the United Nations system. The specialized agencies and the programmes have proved flexible enough to make structural, programme and budget changes to enable them to provide support for the implementation of Agenda 21.

2. However, a key difficulty faced by the United Nations system is that not all governing and policy-making bodies have the same understanding of the concept of sustainable development. In some cases, sustainability is equated with environmentally sound management of natural resources, to the neglect of broader social and economic issues. Improved policy coordination across various governing bodies within the United Nations system is essential to ensuring policy coherence, more effective joint programming, more efficient deployment of resources and the avoidance of duplication resulting from overlapping tasks which might be mandated to different secretariats by their governing bodies.

3. Sustainable development demands a qualitatively different approach to coordination at both policy-making and programme implementation levels. United Nations agencies and secretariats of conventions have had to develop new institutional arrangements which can facilitate intersectoral cooperation, and new programming techniques within and between organizations. Institutional innovation is also occurring in national aid agencies. Greater cooperation between bilateral and multilateral agencies would enhance and encourage the wider adoption of these approaches.

4. In addition, Member States should promote effective coordination at the level of intergovernmental decision-making. In the language of Agenda 21, the Commission on Sustainable Development is to "rationalize the intergovernmental decision-making capacity for the integration of environment and development issues". This mandate has not been fully realized. The Commission's role is political; it does not have decision-making authority with respect to other intergovernmental processes, but it can promote common policy approaches, geared to cross-sectoral issues, to advance sustainable development if relevant responses are ensured throughout the United Nations system.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

A new approach to international policy-making

5. Experience with policy development and implementation in the years since the Rio Conference has made clear the need for new approaches which stress the operational aspects of sustainable development. Intergovernmental dialogue on sustainable development could usefully be reorganized to consider a limited number of strategic priority issues, so as to develop a more focused approach to relevant activities in the United Nations system both at the international and at the regional and country levels. The Administrative Committee on Coordination supports the proposals concerning the work programme of the Commission on Sustainable Development after 1997 contained in the report of the Secretary-General on overall progress achieved since Rio.* The new work programme would subject a limited number of thematic areas to in-depth consideration, highlighting the linkages with relevant chapters of Agenda 21 and the role of relevant economic sectors and major groups. This approach would promote a new emphasis on cross-cutting issues such as production and consumption patterns, population, health, impacts on gender and children and means of implementation, including finance and technology transfer, capacity-building and education, which will be essential to the development of practical and integrated policies.

Operations at the regional level

6. Since the Conference new forms of inter-agency cooperation have emerged at the regional level. They include cooperation between the regional commissions and regional representatives of the global United Nations agencies and programmes. Examples are the adoption of the Regional Action Programme for Asia and the Pacific, the establishment by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, in cooperation with United Nations Environment Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, of the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region and the upcoming memorandum of understanding between the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Bank on collaboration in water supply, environment and sanitation in Africa. Moreover, regional organizations outside the United Nations system have taken an active role in some regions in preparing regional plans and programmes to follow up on United Nations conferences and other international programme activities, and implementation of conventions. However, achieving a better balance between work at the global level and work at the regional level will be essential for success in the next stage of Agenda 21 implementation. In those areas of sustainable development where regional approaches may prove to be most promising, possibilities for entrusting the United Nations regional commission with a more active coordination role should also be explored.

7. It is necessary to intensify regional implementation of the three Rio conventions, namely, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, particularly through undertaking initiatives aimed at linking activities and projects in the areas of drought and desertification, climate change, forests and biodiversity. Regional cooperation

is also vital in implementing related conventions and the commitments stemming from the series of global conferences organized by the United Nations since 1990, all of which have incorporated the fundamental principles and policy goals of Agenda 21. Regional cooperation will continue to be of great importance in implementing regional environmental agreements.

Operations at the national level

8. It is recognized that institutional cooperation at the national level should be based on country needs and requirements and an appropriate enabling context. Where national sustainable development strategies exist, and national institutional arrangements promote an integrated approach, this facilitates inter-agency cooperation and partnership. Progress in there areas, however, has been slow. Organizations with mainly analytical or normative roles and no country representation have no direct access at the country level and few means of interaction with potential partners.

9. Improved country-level coordination is needed not only among the international and regional organizations but also, in particular, among the donor programmes and activities, which are sometimes carried out in isolation from relevant inter-agency activities and national coordination mechanisms. Such coordination is needed both for the implementation of Agenda 21 initiatives, and for effective follow-up among focal points dealing with the major environmental, social and developmental conventions. Country strategy notes, which were proposed as a basis for country-level coordination, have not yet emerged as a mechanism that can ensure effective interorganizational cooperation, and the resident coordinator system has not yet realized its full potential and needs further strengthening and commitment by the system as a whole.

REVIEW OF INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION*

The Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development and its task manager system

10. Almost immediately after the Rio Conference, the Administrative Committee on Coordination, taking into account provisions of Agenda 21, decided on an institutional framework for promoting a coherent system-wide response to Conference follow-up requirements. That framework was built on an innovative model that combined central coordination functions, vested in the mandates of the Administrative Committee on Coordination and the newly established Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development, and decentralized allocation of specific responsibilities to relevant organizations of the United Nations system, based on their comparative strengths, to act as task managers for various programme components of Agenda 21.

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* The Administrative Committee on Coordination undertook a review of the functioning of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development as part of its preparations for the special session of the General Assembly. A summary of the results of the review exercise is given in this section of the statement.

11. As more experience has been gained in the implementation of Agenda 21 and in the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development, modalities for inter-agency collaboration have evolved considerably. The Inter-Agency Committee has gained in importance as an umbrella for coordination initiatives, which at the same time give full rein to numerous, more specialized inter-agency mechanisms. Experience shows that those mechanisms have worked best when taking a focused, thematic approach. That permits them to draw more deeply on each agency's expertise and resources and promotes detailed, technical collaboration related to data and information, policy and practice, or operational programmes. This has to be taken fully into account in future work, which includes improving the effectiveness of the Administrative Committee on Coordination's subcommittees on freshwater and on oceans and coastal areas; the latter subcommittee was called for by the Commission on Sustainable Development.

12. System-wide work aimed at further broadening and deepening existing inter-agency collaboration and coordination in follow-up to the Rio Conference has become an ongoing process in the United Nations system. It includes continuing consideration of measures aimed at improving the delivery capacity and coordination at the field level, enhancing policy coordination at the global, regional and country levels, better interaction between the Inter-Agency Committee and other bodies and mechanisms of the Administrative Committee on Coordination for inter-agency coordination, streamlining requests for reporting, and involvement of organizations outside the United Nations system, among others.

13. The task manager system should continue to promote greater interaction with other inter-agency arrangements, including those established to follow up other recent United Nations conferences. It has furthered outreach beyond the framework of the United Nations system, with a view to involving other relevant intergovernmental organizations and processes, as well as partners from major groups and the non-governmental organizations.

14. Task managers should continue to expand their efforts to involve major groups more widely in consultations regarding the preparation of reports for the Commission and implementation of sustainable development activities and, when appropriate, to invite experts from major groups to participate in inter-agency expert meetings.

15. In the view of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, these evolving arrangements have generally allowed the United Nations system to provide a flexible, collaborative and participatory mechanism to support the implementation of Agenda 21 and coordination of various sustainable development activities. Successful examples of system-wide collaboration, particularly at the programme/country levels, include the Interorganizational Programme on the Sound Management of Chemicals, established as an inter-agency partnership arrangement in support of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety; the informal Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests, established to respond to the needs of the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests; and cooperation in the context of the Commission's programme on indicators for sustainable development. Several cooperative inter-agency programmes which preceded the Conference, particularly in the area of science, information and analysis, have now been

linked to the Inter-Agency Committee through its task manager system, such as the World Climate Programme.

16. The Administrative Committee on Coordination believes that the task manager system of the Inter-Agency Committee has generally led to more effective use of resources and expertise within the United Nations system and is a promising improvement over previous efforts at inter-agency cooperation and joint action. It has rationalized the preparation of reports for the Commission and facilitated contributions among organizations based on their specialized mandates. By encouraging systematic communication and information exchange, it has helped disseminate knowledge of means to promote sustainable development and reduced duplication of effort.

17. Nevertheless, it is the view of the Administrative Committee on Coordination that the task manager system has not yet realized its full potential in fostering coordination among all the agencies. The review of the functioning of the Inter-Agency Committee conducted by the Administrative Committee on Coordination led to the conclusion that a better balance is needed in coordination at global, regional and country/field levels. Cooperation remains underdeveloped at the regional level - although in some instances, such as in the region of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, agencies have been designated as coordinators for specific programme areas of the regional action programme.

18. Further specification of task manager roles will be necessary, to distinguish between ongoing data and information functions, for example, and cooperation at regional or national levels on programme delivery. Task managers should be encouraged to promote joint programming at the regional and subregional levels, and to foster a more integrated approach which incorporates the social and economic dimensions of sustainable development.

Resource issues

19. Inter-agency coordination entails both benefits and costs. Its goal is to combine the expert skills and financial resources of individual agencies so that policies, information resources, and operational programmes better integrate specific sustainable development concerns. Moreover, resources may be deployed more cost-effectively when agencies collaborate in a mutually reinforcing manner, or when they accept a division of labour which avoids programme duplication. Yet consultations and networking among specialists in different fields take time, and, in spite of the fact that modern communications technology can facilitate and expedite communications, face-to-face interactions remain essential in generating responsiveness and improving results. Meetings require staff time for preparing discussion papers and reports, as well as travel expenses.

20. The task manager system therefore has its costs. System-wide reporting responsibilities have placed a considerable strain on individual organizations, as they have been borne within existing human and financial resources. It has been difficult financially to keep up representation in the Commission, the Inter-Agency Committee and Agenda 21-related meetings and with those relevant to the agency's mandate. Further operationalization of new political agreements

reached at the intergovernmental level and moving towards joint programming would give rise to additional demands.

21. The financial crisis affecting the United Nations and many of the specialized agencies and programmes leaves little room for innovative and more cooperative initiatives by individual agencies or throughout the system. The expectations raised by the Rio Conference of an increase in available resources have not been met, while the activities that had to be carried out have expanded considerably. The organizations and agencies of the United Nations system are therefore hard-pressed to carry out both their original mandates and those stemming from the Conference and the work requirements of the Commission. At the same time, as changes in programmes and procedures yield appreciable improvements, they offer new opportunities and invite further commitments and requests on the part of Member States.

22. Joint programming, directly involving a limited number of the most concerned agencies, needs to be further fostered. Policy integration and the need for coordinated action are the central messages of Agenda 21. However, it is becoming urgently apparent that efforts to promote integrated approaches to coordination at policy-making and programme implementation levels are not matched by coordinated funding mechanisms. United Nations agencies involved in joint programmes are generally required to seek funding from their own funding bodies, with adverse effects on resource efficiency. In this context, efforts should be increased to enhance the effectiveness of cooperation between various agencies of the United Nations system with international financial institutions, including those outside the United Nations system such as regional development banks. There is, moreover, a need for further development of joint funding arrangements, so that joint funding proposals can be presented for more effective consideration by appropriate funding institutions and mechanisms.

Notes

* E/CN.17/1997/2.

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